

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000101

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY  
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER  
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS  
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD  
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ  
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLs](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: OIL WORKER HOSTAGE UPDATE SITREP #16

REF: A. LAGOS 99 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). ABUJA 120

Classified By: Acting Section Chief Shannon Ross for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)  
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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Press reports of additional hostages are false. Bayelsa state officials' assurances of the hostages' release were proven wrong, and the negotiators are delaying further talks regarding the crisis. Delta State officials have not been any more in touch or informed about the situation than the Bayelsa team. Mission, British High Commission, and industry representatives continue to pursue communication through Peter Quiatkowski's contacts, so far the only proven avenue to the kidnap gang. Mission remains on alert to support the hostages' repatriation while continuing to pursue all promising leads. End summary.

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MISTAKEN MEDIA REPORTS OF ADDITIONAL HOSTAGES  
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[1](#)2. (C) Press reports that four additional hostages were taken are false. The Guardian, a national daily, mistakenly repeated their report word-for-word, including the names of the hostages, incorrectly identifying them as abducted yesterday. There have been no additional hostages taken.

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HOSTAGE WELFARE UPDATE:  
STILL NO PROGRESS FROM BAYELSA STATE TEAM  
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[1](#)3. (C) Despite Bayelsa negotiators' assurances, Mission has received no notification of the hostages release. Conoff in Yenagoa in contact with the five-person Bayelsa negotiating team was told that release was delayed by powerful thunderstorms in the area overnight. Following up on the negotiators' plan to meet with the kidnappers overnight, Conoff contacted Jane Alekioc and Kennedy Onibebe, but both stated they had not gone to the creeks as planned. Conoff could not reach the other negotiators. Chairman Joshua Benamaisia told Econoff that he had visited the creeks overnight, but has not provided any details about the trip.

[1](#)4. (C) Conoff's meeting with the Bayelsa negotiating team this morning was postponed. Since the predicted release did not happen, the Bayelsa SSG has continued to defer meeting with us.

[1](#)5. (C) Bayelsa SSG introduced Conoff to Captain Clery (Government Ekpemupolo's uncle) and Chief Saturday Gregden, both of whom confidently said negotiations were ongoing and would soon bear fruit. It is unclear what prompted the introduction, but Conoff will pursue the relationship and investigate what they can offer.

[1](#)6. (C) Pressed by Conoff about any new developments or recent confirmation of the hostages' well-being, Bayelsa SSG eventually said he knew the hostages were still fine because the State Security Service (SSS) in Abuja has a recent videotape of them. No explanation was provided for when or how the tape was obtained, or why its existence was not divulged immediately. (Comment: Conoff's impression is that SSG either knows nothing, or knows much but is reluctant to cooperate with us. At times throughout this crisis the SSG has stonewalled, relenting only when pressed, and then seeming to tell us vague, unsubstantiated yet encouraging news, presumably to placate us. News of the recent videotape was provided in a similar manner. End comment.)

[1](#)7. (C) Shell sources independently reported that the SSS Director General in Abuja had a videotape of the hostages. They also related that negotiations stalled on the morning of January 25, and that Asari's release was "back on the table."

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THE SECOND FRONT: WARRI, DELTA STATE  
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18. (C) POL Counselor met an associate of FNDIC President Bello Oboko, who said Oboko was not available but might be able to meet soon. The associate did confirm that three people, Boro Tutu, Peter Ajugbe, and someone known as "Bailbond", had been arrested, but said Tutu and Ajugbe had already been released. The associate described Tutu and Ajugbe as young boys with limited access to the kidnap group's leadership. (Note: Delta and Bayelsa SSGs both deny any arrests have been made, and Bayelsa SSG specifically denied Peter Ajugbe had been arrested. End note.) Oboko's associate also claimed that the demands for the hostages' release, including GON release of Asari, have never changed.

19. (C) Meeting with POL Counselor, Delta SSG continues to portray the kidnapping was a Bayelsa State issue.

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SHELL IJAW TO ASSIST FAMILY APPEALS APPROACH  
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110. (C) Scotland Yard and FBI representatives are advising and handling communication with the families regarding possible public appeals. An Ijaw who is a senior employee of Shell will be consulted to refine design of the family appeals, and to identify the most effective approach for gaining sympathy and the most effective family members to deliver the appeal.

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UPDATE ON ALTERNATIVE LINES OF COMMUNICATION  
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11. (C) Ecodrill Country Manager Peter Quiatkowski is returning to Warri to contact the two intermediaries who visited the kidnappers' camp earlier this week. Scotland Yard and FBI have coached Quiatkowski on how to work with the intermediaries and craft communications to the group. Quiatkowski will ask the intermediaries to determine if the hostages are still being kept together; the primary goal remains to reconfirm the hostages' well-being.

12. (C) Quiatkowski has also identified a possible second line of communication to the kidnappers. A former Ecodrill employee, Tony (last name unknown), is from the area where the hostages are believed to be. He has contacted a respected chief in the area who is willing to travel to the community with Tony. They will attempt to convince the kidnappers their course is counterproductive, and there are more appropriate and effective means of furthering their cause.

13. (C) Quiatkowski will also attempt to learn more about the hostages through the chief, but their prospects depend on whether the chief can gain admittance to the camp to see the hostages.

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RUMORED MILITARY ACTION  
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14. (C) Beginning late last night, Mission began receiving reports of military action in the Delta, but none of the reports could be confirmed. One account described some sort of overflight activity as a "show of force." DATF sources only report "the usual" buildup of military personnel in this type of crisis situation. Shell sources also reported some aircraft activity in the region.

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COMMENT  
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15. (C) Evidence that state or federal officials have any handle on the hostage crisis is dwindling. We continue to investigate additional sources of information and lines of communication to effect their release. End comment.  
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